

**Diary Entry**  
**Brazos Santiago, Texas**  
**24 September 1846-10 October 1846**

**[Leaving New York]**

We left West Point on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September 1846 for General Taylor's army in Mexico – Company "A," Engineers consisted of Captain [A. J.] Swift, Lieutenant G. W. Smith, myself and seventy-one rank and file. On Saturday the 26<sup>th</sup> we sailed from the Narrows bond to Brazos de Santiago where we were so fortunate as to arrive in fourteen days. We had a very pleasant passage, on the whole. Felt very much the want of ice, and claret. At one time could only eat raw tomatoes.

**[Brazos Santiago, the Port]**

Brazos is probably the very worst port that could be found on the whole American coast. We are encamped on an island which is nothing more than a sand bar, perfectly barren, utterly destitute of any sign of vegetation. It is about six miles long and one-half mile broad. We are placed about one hundred yards from the sea, a row of sand hills some twenty feet high intervening; whenever a strong breeze blows the sand flies along in perfect clouds, filling your tent, eyes and everything else. To dry ink you have merely to dip your paper in the sand. The only good thing about the place is the bathing in the surf.

**[Finding Water]**

The water which we drink is obtained by digging a hole large enough to contain a barrel. In this is placed a bottomless barrel in which the water collects. You must dig until you find water, then "work-in" the barrel until it is well down. This water is very bad. It is brackish and unhealthy.

The island is often overflowed to the depth of one or two feet. To reach this interesting spot, one is taken from the vessel in a steamboat and taken over a bar on which the water is six feet deep, and where the surf breaks with the greatest violence. It is often impossible to communicate with the vessels outside for ten days or two weeks at a time.

We have been here since Monday afternoon [10 October] and it is now Friday [14 October]. We expect to march for the mouth of the Rio Grande tomorrow morning at break of day – thence by steamboat to Matamoras where we will remain until our arrangements for the ponton train are complete. We received when we arrived the news of the battle of Monterey.

**George B. McClellan to Elizabeth Brinton McClellan  
Camp Opposite Camargo, Mexico  
14 November 1846**

While at Brazos and on the way thence to Matamoras, I was too busy to write; when I arrived at Matamoras I was almost immediately taken sick. I remained so during the two weeks we stayed there, and whilst on the steamboat thence to Camargo. When we got here, I went into Hospital Quarters where I emerged yesterday, so that I have had almost a month's sickness, but now I am perfectly well

**[At Camargo: Its People]**

My quarters in Camargo were large apartments in palace of Don Jesus Guiste, brother of the Alcalde. The Don has left for parts unknown. I wish you could see the gorgeous paintings on the walls of the palace; you would laugh your eyes out, and *then* you wouldn't stop. Mexico is altogether the queerest place I ever came across – it is chaparral, chaparral, nothing but chaparral so far. The people are very polite to the Regulars. Their dress is very pretty; quite picturesque, indeed. The men are very fine looking, rather superior to the corresponding sex of our people. The women, as far as I have seen are a very dirty, ugly looking set. No black-eyed Senoritas have as yet been visible.

**[Houses – the *jacales*]**

The generality of the houses are miserable huts, built of upright logs, canes and mud, with thatched roofs. If you look in one, you will see in the simple apartment about a dozen men, women, children, dogs, goats, &c., &c. in the dirt. They are a very dirty people in their houses. Some of the houses (in the towns) are

Class is unknown amongst them.

### **[Visit to a Rancho]**

I rode out this morning with Jimmy Stuart to a very pretty rancho, indeed, some of the houses built of stone. The people were rather sulky – probably because the volunteers are very troublesome to them.

### **[Character of Mexicans]**

The Mexicans are a most deceitful and rascally set of devils. I believe that it is nothing but fear which makes them pay such great respect to the regulars. They would like to cut all our throats in the dark, - but, thank Heaven! They are afraid. Should we meet with reverses, and be forced to retreat, not a straggler would escape. Our safety lies in our success.

### **[Weather in November]**

The nights are becoming most delightfully cool and the days not quite so hot. Does it not appear strange to you, that whilst you are shivering in the middle of November, we are roasting in our tents? This is a most barren and uninteresting country – not entirely uninteresting either, for I find a great deal of amusement in observing the habits of the people, &c., &c. I would not have missed coming here for anything in the world, now that I am well and recovering my strength.

### **[Killing a rattler]**

Talking of Palo Alto reminds me that I killed an enormous rattlesnake there. I shot him through the head with a horse pistol, . . .

### **[Oranges in Lower Valley]**

We have very nice oranges here, but they (as everything else) are very dear. The nearer you get to Monterrey (where they grow in great abundance) the more they ask for them.

### **[Church Bells]**

They have three bells in the church here and they manage to keep up the most horrible racket you ever heard in your life. It almost set me crazy when I was on the other side. They are at it now, full tilt. They

**Camp Opposite Camargo  
15 November 1846**

We marched from Brazos to the mouth of the Rio Grande and on arriving there found ourselves without tents, provisions or working utensils, a cold Norther blowing all the time.

**[Description of Rio Grande Valley]**

We left in the *Corvette*<sup>2</sup> the next morning (Sunday) for Matamoras, where we arrived at about 5 P.M. The Rio Grande is a very narrow, muddy stream. The channel is very uncertain, changing from day to day. The banks are covered with the mesquite trees, canes, cabbage trees, etc. The ranchos are rather sparse, but some of them are very prettily situated. They all consist of miserable huts built of mesquite logs and canes placed upright – the interstices filled with mud. The roofs are thatched, either with canes or the leaves of the cabbage tree (a species of palmetto).

**[Crops in Lower Valley]**

Cotton appears to grow quite plentifully on the banks, but is not cultivated at all. The Mexicans appear to cultivate nothing whatever but a little Indian corn (maize). They are certainly the laziest people in existence – living in a rich and fertile country (the banks of the river at least) they are content to roll in the mud, eat their horrible beef and tortillas and dance all night at their fandangos. This appears to be the character of the Mexicans as far as I have seen, but they will probably improve as we proceed further in the country.

**[Description of Matamoras]**

Matamoras is situated about a quarter mile from the river. Some of the houses on the principal streets are of stone, there is one near the Plaza built in the American style with three stories and garrets. The great majority of the houses are of log. The place is quite Americanized by our army and the usual train of sutlers, etc., etc. You can get almost everything you want there.

After being sick for nearly two weeks in Matamoras I left with the company for Camargo on the *Whiteville*,<sup>3</sup> where we arrived two weeks ago tomorrow, and I have been in Hospital Quarters ever since until day before yesterday.<sup>4</sup> My quarters in Camargo were the Palace of Don Jesus, the brother of the Alcalde. The floor is of hard earth, the walls white, and very fancifully decorated with paintings – the roof flat and painted green – an inscription on it showing that “Se acabó esta casa en este Dia &c. &c. 1829.”<sup>5</sup>

**George B. McClellan to Charles S. Stewart<sup>1</sup>**  
**Steamer *Corvette* on the Rio Grande**  
**1 December 1846**

**[More on Matamoras]**

My dear Capt<sup>8</sup>

Matamoras is quite a nice place (*for Mexico*). There are many stores there now kept by Americans so that you can procure many conveniences there. The best houses are built of stone. They are one storied, with flat roofs, have one door, one window, without any glass and look more like stables or prisons than private houses.

**[Jacales]**

The ranchos are all built of Mosquite [*sic*] logs and cane. They are without exception the most uncomfortable, the dirtiest, most Mexican things you can imagine. There they crowd together men, women, children, pigs, goats, and everything else. No modesty, no decency, and no cleanliness.

**[Camargo]**

Camargo is much worse. It has the peculiarly pleasant characteristic of being the dustiest place on the face of the Earth. Your eyes and everything you have must be filled with dust there and the water is bad.

**[A Sick Soldier]**

Legs has gone down to Matamoras on his way home. He has been ordered out of the country by the Surgeon on account of his health; the surgeon tells me that he never can do duty in this country, especially in the Dragoons, and that he is afraid that he is very apt to live but a very few years, any how.

I am very anxious to get down to the mouth where I'll have sea bathing and fresh mullet in abundance.

Tampico will probably be a more pleasant place than any I have yet seen in Mexico. I hope to heaven it proves to be so, for I have not seen much fun out here yet.

**Diary Entry  
Mouth of the Rio Grande  
5 December 1846**

**[On to Tampico]**

After a great many orders and counter orders we have at length arrived thus far on our way to Tampico.

We left Camargo on Sunday evening last (November 29<sup>th</sup>) in the *Corvette*, with Generals Patterson and Pillow<sup>1</sup> and a number of other officers.

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The General started with the intention of going to Tampico by sea – all the troops (except the Tennessee cavalry) were to go by sea, but at Reynosa an express overtook up ordering the General to proceed by land with all the troops except this company, which is to go by sea(!).

**[III Volunteers]**

I have seen more suffering since I came out here than I could have imagined to exist. It is really awful. I allude to the sufferings of the Volunteers. They literally die like dogs. Were it all known in the States, there would be no more hue and cry against the Army, all would be willing to have so large a regular army that we could dispense entirely with the volunteer system. The suffering among the Regulars is comparatively trifling, for their officers know their duty and take good care of the men.

**[Complaints against Quartermaster]**

I have also come to the conclusion that the Quartermaster's Department is most woefully conducted – never trust anything to that Department which you can do for yourself. If you need horses for your trains, etc., carry them with you. As to provisions (for private use) get as much as possible from the

Commissaries – you get things from them at one half the price you pay others.

**20 December 1846**

**[On Road to Tampico]**

My Dear Sister,

I have only time to scribble half a dozen lines to you today [to tell you] that we start from this place this afternoon or tomorrow morning, to march to Tampico, via Victoria.<sup>1</sup> We leave behind us everything in the shape of heavy baggage such as trunks &c. – taking only a small carpet bag and a pair of saddle bags.<sup>2</sup>

From Matamoras to this place the road is excellent, requiring no repairs – chaparral generally thick on road side – one or two small prairies – road would be boggy in wet weather.

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We stopped for nearly an hour at Salina – a pond of rather bad water about half way to Santa Teresa.

At Santa Teresa the water was very bad – being obtained from a tancho.

Road good – passes principally through prairie – at Salina wood scarce in immediate vicinity of the water, plenty about three quarters of a mile from it. Wood not very plenty at Santa Teresa – enough however.

**Diary Entry  
Rio La Corona  
3 January 1847**

**[Description of a Countryside]**

We started before daylight and succeeded in getting clear of the volunteer camp by dint of great exertions. After marching about five miles through a fertile river bottom we reached the main branch of the Soto La Marina, a most beautiful stream of the clearest, coldest, most rapid water I ever saw – about sixty yards wide and three feet deep.

**4 January 1847**

**[Continues to Victoria]**

Very early we started for Victoria – and had to work our way through the camp of the Illinois regiments which was placed along the road. At last we cleared them and found ourselves marching by moonlight through a beautiful grove of pecan trees. I know nothing more pleasant than this moonlight marching, everything is so beautiful and quiet.

The road this day was very good, and after a march of about seventeen miles we reached Victoria.<sup>2</sup>

**Diary Entry  
Tampico  
13 January 1847**

**[On Road to Tampico]**

Left Victoria January 13<sup>th</sup> and arrived at Tampico on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. Wednesday January 13<sup>th</sup>. From Victoria to Santa Rosa four leagues. Road not very hilly, but had to be cut through thick brush; two very bad wet arroyos were bridged.

**Diary Entry  
Bank of the Rio La Tula  
16 January 1847**

Reveill  at 3 – started at 4 – arrived at end of preceding day's work just at daybreak. Road very stony in many places swore like a trooper all day - .

**Diary Entry  
Fordleone  
17 January 1847**

Started before daybreak – road quite good – prairie land – arrived at Fordleone or Ferl n at about half after ten. Fine large stream of excellent water – good ford – gravelly bottom – gentle banks. 11 miles



**18 January 1847**

Reveill  at 3. Started long before daybreak – eyes almost shipped out of my head in the dark by the branches. Crossed the Rio Persas again at a quarter before seven – road rather stony in some places, but generally good. Great many palmetto trees – beautiful level country, covered with palmettos and cattle. Water from a stream, but bad. Porter sent us a peccary.<sup>1</sup> Rode on about three miles and found the road pretty good.

**Diary Entry  
El Petril to Tampico  
19 January 1847 – 24 January 1847**

From this place to Tampico, the principal labor consisted in making a practicable wagon road across the numerous arroyos – most of them dry at the time we passed: the banks very steep. Altamira is a pretty little town, one march from Tampico.<sup>3</sup> The road between them passes through a very magnificent forest of live oaks.

**Diary Entry  
Tampico  
24 January 1847 – 24 February 1847**

**[Arrives t Tampico]**

Tampico is a delightful place – we passed a very pleasant time there and left it with regret.<sup>1</sup> We found the Artillery regiments encamped around the city. Many of the officers came out to meet us near Altamira. Champagne suppers were the order of the day (night I should say) for a long time.